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The *Farewell* Symphony Between Paris and Russia

by John A. Rice

Abstract

Sergei Bondarchuk's epic cinematization of Tolstoy's *War and Peace* (1965–67) makes touching use of the last movement of Haydn's *Farewell* Symphony. First played by an orchestra on the grounds of the country estate of old Prince Nicholas Bolkonsky, the music comes to be associated, in the course of several recurrences, with the estate's isolation, emotional as well as physical. This section of the film may be seen on this YouTube video:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W4EcRSoOG_w&feature=youtu.be&t=40m18s.
The dramatic appropriateness of the Adagio makes viewers forget the chronological disjunction between music composed in 1772 and events taking place more than thirty years later. But perhaps Bondarchuk's use of the *Farewell* is not quite as anachronistic as it seems. The symphony plays an unexpected role in letters that a Russian nobleman and a French cellist exchanged from 1783 to 1793, as one of several symphonies by Haydn shipped from Paris to Russia. Thus the *Farewell* may have really been part of the sound-world of the Russian nobility during the Napoleonic era.

Count Nicholas Sheremetev, one of Russia's richest noblemen, was born in 1751 (thus only a decade or so younger than Tolstoy's fictional Nicholas Bolkonsky). A youthful visit to Paris in the early 1770s left him passionately fond of French opera, and he devoted much of his life to the production of opera on his estates near Moscow, where his serfs served as singers, instrumentalists, and stagehands. In Paris Nicholas played chamber music with a cellist in the orchestra of the Opéra and the Concert Spirituel whom we know only by his last name, Hivart. As Nicholas's musical ambitions grew, Hivart became his agent and artistic advisor, sending designs for scenery and costumes, theatrical models, printed scores, librettos, and sets of instrumental parts. The letters that accompanied the shipments have long been available in Russian translation (in N.

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A. Elizarova's *Teatry Sheremetevykh* [Moscow, 1944]). But they have never been published in the original French and are little known outside Russia.

The primary value of the Hivart-Sheremetev correspondence lies in what it tells us about how opera was staged in Paris in the 1780s. But this study, based on the letters in the original French (as preserved in the Russian State Historical Archive in St. Petersburg), demonstrates their value for students of instrumental music as well. It corroborates other kinds of evidence of the popularity of Haydn's symphonies in Paris, gives us new information about how Parisian audiences reacted to the *Farewell* Symphony, and alerts us to the presence in Russia, before 1790, of many of Haydn's symphonies, including the *Farewell*.

I. Introduction

Sergei Bondarchuk's epic, four-part cinematization of Tolstoy's *War and Peace* (1965–67) makes touching use of the last movement of Haydn's Farewell Symphony. Bondarchuk encourages viewers to associate the music with Bald Hills, the country estate of old Prince Nicholas Bolkonsky, by showing it first being played by a small orchestra on the grounds of the estate. After this initial diegetic presentation Haydn's music is heard non-diegetically, as an expression of the isolation—emotional as well as physical—of the estate, and perhaps inviting sophisticated viewers to draw parallels between Bald Hills and the equally isolated Eszterháza of another Prince Nicholas, Haydn's employer Nicholas Esterházy (1714–1790). In retrospect, Haydn's Farewell can be understood in the film as adumbrating the deaths of Prince Bolkonsky, his young daughter-in-law Lisa, and—most tragic of all—his son, the heroic Prince André.

The dramatic appropriateness of Haydn's Adagio in Bondarchuk's *War and Peace* makes us forget the chronological disjunction between music composed in 1772 and events taking place more than thirty years later. It also makes us forget that the sense of melancholy, even tragedy, conveyed by the Adagio's use in *War and Peace* differs from

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the way eighteenth-century audiences perceived the end of Haydn's symphony (in so far as we know of their perceptions, to be discussed below).

But perhaps Bondarchuk's use of Haydn's Farewell is not quite as anachronistic as it seems. The symphony plays an unexpected—albeit small—role in the letters that a Russian nobleman (yet another Nicholas) and a French cellist exchanged from 1784 to 1793. Although the primary value of this correspondence lies in what it tells us about how opera was staged in Paris in the 1780s, the letters also confirm other kinds of evidence of the popularity of Haydn's symphonies in Paris during that decade and alert us to the presence in Russia of many of the symphonies, including the Farewell, before 1790.

II. The Hivart-Sheremetev correspondence

Count Nicholas Sheremetev (also transcribed as Sheremetyev), one of Russia's richest noblemen, was born in 1751 (thus thirty-seven years younger than Nicholas Esterházy but perhaps only a decade or so younger than Tolstoy's fictional Nicholas Bolkonsky). A youthful visit to Paris in the early 1770s left him passionately fond of French opera, both opéra-comique and tragédie lyrique. He devoted much of his life to the production of opera on his estates near Moscow, where his serfs served as singers, instrumentalists, and stagehands. His activities as an operatic impresario were inextricably intertwined with his love for the serf soprano Prascovia—his prima donna, mistress, and finally—to the indignation of the Russian nobility—his wife.[1]

During his visit to Paris Nicholas played chamber music with (and probably took lessons from) a cellist in the orchestra of the Académie Royale de Musique (informally known as the Opéra) whom we know only by his last name, Hivart. In 1783, as Nicholas's musical

[1] On Nicholas and Prascovia see Douglas Smith, *The Pearl: A True Tale of Forbidden Love in Catherine the Great's Russia* (New Haven, 2008). N. A. Elizarova, *Teatry Sheremetevykh* (Moscow, 1944) is a pioneering, thorough study of Nicholas's theatrical activities.

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ambitions grew, he turned to Hivart for help. The French cellist became his agent and artistic advisor, commissioning designs for scenery and costumes, manuscript copies of operatic scores and sets of parts, and theatrical models; and buying printed scores, librettos, and a vast array of other musical and theatrical material. He shipped these to Russia, usually twice a year, in trunks—first to Rouen or Le Havre, where they were transferred to ocean-going ships for the voyage to Saint Petersburg. Hivart also advised Nicholas on musical and theatrical matters, most voluminously on the staging of opera—a subject on which Nicholas was endlessly curious. In direct contact with such composers as Grétry, Sacchini, and Piccinni, and the stage machinist and ballet master of the Opéra, Hivart watched, from his place in the orchestra, their work take shape on stage. This gives his letters significant value for historians of opera in eighteenth-century Paris, especially *tragédie lyrique*.[2]

As a member of the orchestra of the Opéra, Hivart also played in the Concert Spirituel, Paris's longest-lived and most prestigious concert series. This put him in a good position to advise Nicholas on concert music as well as opera.

III. Haydn's music from Paris to Russia

From the inventories that accompanied Hivart's shipments, we know that most of them included printed instrumental music: symphonies, symphonies concertantes, string quartets, trios and duos. Although Hivart sent symphonies by several composers, Haydn predominated. The exact number of symphonies that he sent is unknown, since he tended to list them by groups—sometimes referring to these groups as *œuvres* (that is, sets of works published together).

[2] The Hivart-Sheremetev correspondence appeared in Russian translation in Elizarova, *Teatry Sheremetevykh* but remained largely unknown to Western musicologists until the recent appearance of Smith, *The Pearl*. Working from the Russian translation, Douglas Smith made frequent and effective use of them in describing Nicholas's theatrical activities. I am grateful to Smith for giving me the archival citation that I needed to consult Hivart's original letters (in French) in the Rossiiskii Gosudarstvenyi Istoricheskii Arkhiv (Russian State Historical Archive) in Saint Petersburg (Opis 1088, Fond 1, Delo 186, henceforth referred to as "Hivart letters") and for other advice that greatly contributed to the success of my trip to Saint Petersburg in June 2012. A fully annotated modern edition of the correspondence, including the inventories of shipments from Paris to Russia, would contribute greatly to our knowledge of music and theater in late eighteenth-century Europe; but it is far beyond the scope of this article.

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Hivart's first known shipment, sent on 16 August 1784, included symphonies by a wide variety of composers then popular in Paris:

Table 1: Hivart Shipment of Symphonies, 16 August 1784[3]
Symphonie[s] à grand orchestre.

Haiden et Pichl		10 livres	4 sous
Le Duc, Stamitz et Gossec	7	4	
Gossec, Simp. La Chasse		4	4
Hayden		12	
Sterkell		9	
Sterkell		9	
Hayden		9	
Hayden		9	

Since by far the cheapest item in this list is the only one that is unambiguously a single work (François-Joseph Gossec's "Simphonie de Chasse," published by Sieber around 1776), it is likely that the other items are sets of works, two with symphonies by more than one composer. Parisian publishers often issued symphonies in sets of three or four during the 1780s, so the three sets that cost 9 livres each almost certainly consisted of three symphonies each, while the two sets that cost the most probably consisted of four symphonies. Hivart's crate thus probably contained 24 symphonies, of which about half were by Haydn.[4]

[3] Hivart letters, fol. 5r–v.

[4] The first item on Hivart's list can be identified as *Quatre Simphonies à grand orchestre… composées par Messieurs Hayden et Pichel. Les deux premieres et la quatrième sont de M^r Hayden… Prix 10^#4^s*, published by Guera in Lyon in 1783. This set includes Haydn's Symphonies No. 60 ("Il distratto") and No. 66. (The first symphony in the set is by Johann Baptist Vanhal, not Haydn or Wenzel Pichl.) The second item was *Trois symphonies à 8 parties composées par Mrs. Leduc l'aîné, Stamitz et Gossec*, published in Paris by Leduc in 1776. An example of a set of three Haydn symphonies that cost 9 livres is *Trois Simphonies à grand orchestre … Prix 9^#*, published by Boyer & Le Menu in 1782, which consisted of

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Hivart's next shipment, dated 29 May 1785, included "eight *oeuvres* of symphonies for full orchestra" costing 60 livres, 12 sous, without the names of composers.[5] Assuming (from the previous list, but with Gossec's individually published "La Chasse" being an outlier) a maximum cost of 3 livres per symphony, these eight sets consisted of at least 20 symphonies in all.

The crate that Hivart sent on 6 September 1785 contained no instrumental music. As if to compensate for its absence Hivart included the recently published score of Haydn's *Stabat Mater*, together with a set of manuscript parts and a strong recommendation:

> The engraved score of Haydn's superb *Stabat Mater* with full orchestra was recently published; it is as beautiful a work of its genre as that of Pergolesi. This masterpiece of Latin music has been the ornament of our Concert Spirituel during Easter, when the theaters are closed. As a distinguished amateur you can judge the merit of this work, which I have the honor of sending you along with the separate parts.[6]

The flow of Haydn symphonies soon resumed, and it continued until 1788, when Hivart sent to Russia a crate that contained, among many other items, nine symphonies: six by Haydn costing 15 livres and three by Marie-Alexandre Guénin.[7] From the number of symphonies by Haydn and their price, we can be fairly sure that these were the Paris

Symphonies No. 63, 70, and 71; see Anthony van Hoboken, *Joseph Haydn: Thematisch-bibliographisces Werkverzeichnis*, 3 vols., Mainz, 1957, I, 88.

[5] Huit œuvres de symphonies à grand orchestra (Hivart letters, fol. 10r–11v).

[6] Il paroit depuis peu la partition gravée du superbe Stabat Mater, d'Haiden, à grand orchestre, qui est tout aussi beau dans son genre que celui de Pergolezi. Ce chef d'oeuvre de musique latine fait depuis 3 ans, l'ornement de nos concerts spirituels dans le temps de Paques, qu'il n'y a plus alors de spectacles. Vous pourrez juger du mérite de cet ouvrage en amateur distingué, ayant l'honneur de vous l'envoyer avec les parties separées &c. (Hivart letters, fol. 20r–21v.)

[7] Hivart letters, fol. 80r–84v. The violinist and composer Guénin was a colleague of Hivart's in the orchestra of the Concert Spirituel, quickly rising to the position of concertmaster in that orchestra and that of the Opéra, which he led for thirty years. He published six symphonies in two sets of three: Opus 4 (date of publication unknown) and Opus 6 (1788).

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Symphonies, published earlier that year by Imbault as *Du répertoire de la Loge Olympique six sinfonies à divers instruments composées par J. Haydn… prix 15*.

IV. "The most amusing thing that can be imagined"

Hivart's strongest endorsement of Haydn's music came in a crate weighing 180 pounds that he shipped through Le Havre on 12 September 1786, and in a letter mailed in Paris five days later. The crate contained (among other items) architectural plans, a watch and chain, scores of Grétry's *Richard Coeur-de-Lion* and Dalayrac's *Nina*, an annotated libretto of Salieri's *Les Danaïdes*, and two *modèles en démolition*—working models of architectural sets for *Richard* and *Les Danaïdes* that collapsed during the course of those operas. It also contained instrumental music: symphonies, quartets and duos. The twelve symphonies were all by Haydn.

Hivart may have felt that the predominance of Haydn's symphonies in his choice of instrumental music needed some justification. His letter of 17 September 1786 contains one of his rare comments on instrumental music—and by far the longest:

> I have the honor to send you the twelve most beautiful symphonies for full orchestra that I could find. Among others by Haydn, there is one, No. 16, that is the most amusing thing that can be imaged. The last movement of this symphony begins normally with the whole orchestra, but it does not end the same way, for one sees all the musicians leave one after another, until the first violin finds himself all alone to finish the symphony. The audience is astonished to see just one person in the orchestra. This joke made the audience laugh heartily when we played it at the Concert Spirituel. Here is the origin of this symphony, for Monsieur Le Comte really needs to know it.
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> Haydn was music director of Prince Stérazie, and one day this prince told him that he had become tired of music and that consequently he wanted to dismiss all

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> the musicians, keeping only Haydn. Thus the prince charged him with announcing to his colleagues the sad news. As a man of genius, Haydn wanted to do this with a dramatic act. So he conceived of this symphony, to be performed at the orchestra's last concert, as the means by which the musicians would be dismissed. The prince, surprised to see all the musicians leave until only the first violin remained at the end of the symphony, asked what it meant. Haydn responded: "Did you not order me to dismiss all the players? Well, they obeyed your orders." This symphonic joke pleased the prince so much that he kept his orchestra.[8]

Hivart's version of the story of the symphony's origin is a variation on the one published in the *Mercure de France* in 1784:

> We recount the occasion for which M. Haydn made this joke. It is said that Prince Esterhazy decided to dismiss his orchestra and to keep only a few violins. This symphony was performed, and it did not much please the prince, who asked for an explanation of this oddity. "I wanted to express" M. Haydn told him, "the regrets of the musicians who remain in your employ on the loss of their comrades, and to give you the chance to hear what your orchestra will sound like when it consists of just a few violins." The joke was appreciated, and the musicians kept.[9]

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[8] J'ai l'honneur de vous envoyer les douze plus belles symphonies à grand orchestre que j'ai pu trouver, il y a une entre autre d'Hayden, le No. 16, qui est bien la plus drole de chose possible. Le dernier morceau de cette symphonie commence bien avec tout l'orchestre, mais il ne finit pas de même, car on voit tous les musiciens s'en aller les uns après les autres, au point que le premier violon se trouve tout seul pour finir la symphonie. On est tout étonné de ne plus voir qu'une seule personne dans l'orchestre. Cette plaisanterie a fait beaucoup rire le public, lorsque nous l'avons executée au concert spirituel. Voici l'origine de cette symphonie, car il faut bien que Monsieur Le Comte la sache.

Hayden étant le chef du concert du Prince de Stérazie, ce prince lui dit un jour qu'il étoit degouté de musique, que, parconsequent, il vouloit congedier tous ces musiciens, pour ne garder que lui, Hayden. Il fut donc chargé par ce prince d'annoncer a ses confrères cette facheuse nouvelle, mais, en homme de genie, il ne voulut pas que cela se fit sans un coup d'eclat. Il imagina donc cette symphonie en question qu'il fit executer au dernier concert par le moyen de laquelle tous les musiciens se trouvoient congédies: Le prince étonné de voir ainsi tout son orchestre se dégarnir, au point qu'il ne restoit plus à la fin de la symphonie que le premier violon, demanda ce qui cela vouloit dire. Hayden lui répondit, mon Prince, ne m'avez-vous pas chargé de congédier tous vos musiciens, hébien, ils obeissent à vos ordres; cette plaisanterie en symphonie plut tellement au prince qu'il garda sa musique (Hivart letters, fol. 43r–44v).

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This anecdote was firmly rejected by Haydn's personal acquaintance and early biographer Griesinger.[10] There is no need for us to take Hivart's variation on it seriously, except as an example of how quickly and how far false information could travel in the eighteenth century.

More interesting are Hivart's comments in the first paragraph. His enthusiastic admiration for Haydn's symphonies reflects first-hand familiarity acquired in actually playing them at the Concert Spirituel, where they were featured on many concerts during the 1780s. From his reference to the Farewell Symphony as "No. 16," we know that he sent to Nicholas the set of parts published by Sieber as *Simphonie périodique No. 16*.[11] First mentioned in the Sieber catalogue in 1786, the copy Hivart sent to Russia was hot off the press. His mistaken belief that a single violin remained at the end of the Farewell Symphony may be explained by the fact that, as a cellist, he left the orchestra well before the movement ended; so he might not have been as familiar with the end (played by two solo violins) as he was with the part he actually played. Noteworthy too is his statement about how the Parisian audience reacted to the movement: with astonishment and laughter. This is consistent with other accounts (and not only the one in the *Mercure de France*) suggesting that Haydn intended—and eighteenth-century audiences perceived—the Adagio as a joke.[12]

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[9] On raconte ainsi l'occasion pour laquelle M. *Hayden* fit cette plaisanterie. Le Prince d'*Esterhazy* vouloit, disoit on, renvoyer sa musique & ne garder que quelques violons. On exécuta cette symphonie, qui ne plut pas trop au Prince; il demanda la raison de cette bizarrerie. "J'ai voulu exprimer, lui dit M. *Hayden*, les regrets que cause aux Musiciens qui vous resteront, la perte de leurs camarades, & vous faire en même temps sentir ce que deviendra votre musique, quand vous n'aurez plus que quelques violons." La plaisanterie fut goûtée, & les Musiciens conservés (*Mercure de France*, 24 April 1784, 180–81, quoted and commented on in H. C Robbins Landon, *Haydn at Eszterháza, 1766–1790*, Bloomington, IN, 1978, 181, and Christine Siegert, "Hafner – Haydn – Casti/Paisiello: Zum 'Abschied' von der Bühne," in *ACT: Zeitschrift für Musik & Performance,* 2010/1, available online at http://www.act.uni-bayreuth.de/resources/Heft2010-01/ACT2010_01_Siegert_Haydn.pdf

[10] Georg August Griesinger, *Biographische Notizen über Joseph Haydn*, Leipzig, 1810, 29, quoted and commented on in Siegert, "Hafner."

[11] Hoboken, *Haydn,* I, 53.

[12] Daniel Heartz, *Haydn, Mozart, and the Viennese School, 1740–1780* (New York: Norton, 1995), 354–55, quotes (and apparently accepts) Griesinger's characterization of the symphony as "an extended musical joke" (ein durchgeführter musikalischer Scherz).

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But this Adagio does not sound like a joke when it begins, with "un chant triste & lugubre," as the *Mercure de France* put it.[13] Only when the players begin to leave does the music reveal itself to be a *plaisanterie*.

V. Conclusion

I began by referring approvingly to Bondarchuk's use of the last movement of the Farewell Symphony in *War and Peace*. But its effectiveness as an emblem of isolation and a foreshadower of death—its capacity to be heard as "triste & lugubre"—depends on one crucial point: the "pantomime" of the musicians leaving the orchestra, an essential part of Haydn's conception, is entirely absent from the film (as it is, of course, from any recording of the symphony without a visual component). We do see Prince Nicholas Bolkonsky's musicians playing the Adagio, but none of them leaves the ensemble during the brief moment that the orchestra is visible. This liberates the music from its originally humorous context, and allows it to arouse in viewers of *War and Peace* feelings of sadness and foreboding: feelings far from those apparently experienced by eighteenth-century audiences of Haydn's symphony.

[13] Landon, *Haydn at Eszterháza*, 181.

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